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Interview with Steve Lovejoy

Kristin Kvernland

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Researcher's name: Kristin Kvernland

Event: Interview with Steve Lovejoy of the Farm Service Agency

Place: The Farm Service Agency of Knox County, 1025 Harcourt Road, Mt. Vernon

KK: OK so this is um... My name is Kristin Kvernland um it's the thirtieth of October and I'm in the Farm Service Agency interviewing Mr. Steve Lovejoy about local food and how the USDA plays a role in Knox County.

So basically I was just sort of wondering, my first question is what sort of basic services or programs—I familiarized myself a little bit on the website, but I didn't know if there were specific programs that this office did as opposed to other FSA offices? If you could maybe just elaborate on this question.

SL: We're an office that administers federal style programs and um so well how do I put this, the agricultural services of Knox County is aided by our programs, it's not directly related to whether they supply food locally or not so that directly, I don't have information on—

KK: Umm hmm

SL: but our programs traditionally have been ah not a means tested type program so they proportionality provide benefits to small farmers and large farmers according to the structure of the legislated program. So a lot of times a small farmer would get less benefits than a big farmer because (sentence inaudible)... in a lot of ways like the way we administer our conservation program based on whatever conservation project that we have done with regards to conservation (sentence inaudible)... some of our participants supply food which goes to Knox County processors but most of our programs aren't for, traditionally were not for producers specialty products um so much for livestock problems that were repeated and so [throat clear] when you look at our programs and um they, as far as the subsidies for the commodities, they would be traditionally directed more as grain crops. Those probably have a um an outside of the county processing before they would be derived for food back in the country for example soy beans we don't have a crushing mill in Knox County. Um although some farmers may grow soybeans for feed for their livestock that's a little bit of the exception rather than predictable bulk of the soybeans that are produced in the county. And corn, it would have a bit more of a direct relationship with local buyers, corn that is fed in Knox County is actually produced in Knox County, run through the local mills and ground and all those additive's added to it and then it's ah, then used by the livestock producers that could be selling to local processing plants, if you're familiar, are you familiar with the local processing plants like Lannings?

KK: Umm hmm

SL: What are others, there are a few important processing plants in Knox Country so there is a little more of a direct relationship there but the programs, the way they are

2

legislated generally are based on formulas and national prices, and um things that aren't directed one way or another but it is usually (word inaudible)—

KK: Umm hmm, so how do you decide about the ones that you have, do you have, is it flexible, can you change it from coun—

SL: (overlap of talking here) We have basic multi year programs and then a lot of times we get involved with ad hoc legislation and so [throat clearing] so um our basic programs are um the direct and counter cyclical permit program, um that generates probably more money than any other program that we administer in Knox County, and it is [throat clear] directed to those who have land or has a history of growing crops that are such (inaudible sentence) so the government [throat cleared] we make um I can't tell you the amount of money because that varies upon what the prices are too, some of the payments are based on the market price received for crops, some of them are just out and out payments for the fact that the farm has a history of growing a crop that's subsidized. Basically we have about seventeen hundred farms participating in our program, and I think direct payments which are not, not that they would be around two hundred thousand a year that those payments, basically put the money there. Um [sigh] then we also have marketing systems um, those are more based on how busy we are with— that particular program is more based on um the chronologic prices that exist in a particular year and that can be more than the dollar amount that I just quoted to you, or it can be considerably less than that too, based on the um prices used to calculate. When planning things out we look for those um marketing assisting payments too and that's um, that's not even dependent upon people that have a history with them such that if they had grown them or not. So one program's based on what happened in the past the other program's based on what people do currently. Um so [next two sentences are inaudible]

KK: Sorry just to interrupt up you for a second [throat clear] I've heard about some farmers saying that they get subsidies from the government because corn and wheat was grown on their lands a long time ago—

SL: Umm hmm

KK: How does that work exactly? If it's not grown any more and they are still getting payments?

SL: Just, just the way you stated it. If the farm has a recorded history of producing the subsidized crops [throat clear], then the current owner or tenant, whoever is in control of the land, um complies with that program requirements which in turn are, they can't have excessive erosion and they can't join (inaudible word) programs and still be eligible. That's putting it in a simplified way but those are some requirements for being eligible to receive those program benefits. If the land owner, the current land owner, or the current lecee of the property sign the necessary contracts so that he won't end up making the land worse off through excessive erosion or runoff by the wetland provision, they're eligible for the payments on that.

KK: Ok so that's sort of more in terms of conserving it in case, or so that it could be grown again .. if you.. chose to do so?

SL: Well I wouldn't, it's just part of the legislation, I wouldn't state—

KK: Ok

SL: a specific purpose to why its structured that way, um in the new legislation that occurred um in the food and agriculture act that occurred in 1996, changed the way fellow farm programs were structured and paid from a program that paid based on what was planted and programs had a tendency more to economically [throat clearing] dictate what was planted based on what would be most lucrative for farm payments, to a program that said you could plant whatever you want or you cannot plant anything and there is still an eligibility for the payments, freedom to farm was a sort of generic name for this. To put with that, so you know it doesn't really have a stated purpose that its gonna keep the land in agriculture, overall the federal farm programs are intended to promote a safe and reliable food source ok, but that specific provision of the ah the ECP program (few inaudible words here) to keep land farmable in the future, but it probably kind of has the tendency to do that anyway, you know it's hard to afford just to leave it in idle, than keep it in agricultural use you generally (inaudible few words)...

KK: So say I was a farmer, um how would I go about approaching the FSA, do they kind of .. how public is the information about getting involved in programs, and what types of people, and I think you mentioned people that qualify had to comply to a whole set of rules and things, and is that federal or is that something that Knox County decides or—

SL: It's, it's uh, it's fed, federal, there should be no difference between one county and another both contribute, uh, we try to do a good outreach effort with a newsletter and news releases, um and meetings and anybody who's interested is welcome to stop in the office and discuss, and then sometimes for people who aren't familiar with the programs [throat clear] that's the best way to do it because there can be communication back and forth ah to determine what they want to do with the land. And so um, a lot of times we have people coming in and saying what programs do you have for me? And looking at a question like that it's sorta hard to address because usually people have some idea of what they want to do with the land uh so once we find out what they would really like to do with the land we can, then it's a one on one conversation telling them about what's available for that type of use.

KK: Um, do they have to be producing towards I guess a larger scale, so like contributing to um national food sources or could they be like a hog farmer that was contributing just to Lannings and more local—

SL: Yeah, they could, they could be here, or there's no [throat clear], there's no test to who qualifies that way, uh programs are open to everybody that's a US citizen or a green card holders, and even a non citizen could be eligible if they meet our requirement, which is over simplifying it a little bit to say that if they were providing the majority of labor on

4

a US farm they could be eventually eligible for citizenship or green card status... but um, ah, we, our programs are very open for people to participate, and what they produce, what they do with that product, we don't need to know that.

KK and SL: Ha ha ha

KK: Is the, the eligibility, is that sort of public, public information and/or how, what, sort of standing does that have on say a website?

SL: Yeah, we have a website, and it talks about programs and persons eligibility determinations, and it also can be determined when a person comes into this office and completes them.

KK: So, does most of the work that the FSA does financial assistance or do they also do technical assistance, is that—

SL: We're, we're, ah primarily ah financial assistance mm, I guess I didn't mention that we have conservation programs but those two are, our end of it is primarily financial end, we work in conjunction with the RCS office and they're one of the technical agencies that helps landowners design conservation practices um (inaudible word here) practices too, so part of our programs are demonstration, and I didn't give you a number, and to tell you the truth I can't count a number of programs here but there's multiple and then there's ad hoc programs. We administer a program that's called the conservation reserve program and it has all kinds of offshoots to both partners with local governments, where they get um conservation enhancement, um those are probably, are let's see, they also partner with local agencies or government agencies and other non-profits to help increase or for land owners to do conservation and wildlife practices to. So, umm those ah type of practices are generally either wildlife enhancement or soil aversion um, the different programs are more related to where you are geographically in the country but we have about three hundred participants in Knox County for the conservation and uh those (a few words are inaudible here) water quality, erosion abatement and wildlife enhancement. And the program that takes part in this case in order to establish conservation covers or (inaudible words here) or create wildlife habitat and also they treat plants for sort of, sort of wildlife and future timber resources so those are some of the programs that we have. One of the costs to establish the practice that doesn't exist, and we pay payments, and you could say they're sort of like rental payments where the government has a contract, so that the rent with the private land owner, to keep the fallow production appropriately and the conservation reserved fairly, you know they say the program um prohibits um production of ah food crops and ah feed crops while the land is in the program, assuming a ten year program.

KK: One thing um, do you know when the Farm Service Agency was first established here?

SL: Well, ha, ha, its been called a number of different things, but it started in, in the Great Depression under the agricultural adjustment act. I can't quote you all the dates from the

thirties that were run through, but it was basically came out of the agricultural adjustment act, and it was more of a production control type of program, and soil conservation type program. It sort of through the years ah, evolved to what it is now. But the agency was called ASCS for a very long period of time since the thirties, and um that stood for Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Services so the name sort of (inaudible word here) and it was used to stabilize prices and improve conservation so, so more recently about 1994, we changed to Consolidated Farm Service Agency and then we changed just to Farm Service Agency, but ah so, it's had sort of an evolution of the—not too far from what it was originally but more recently it has sort of, it has gone away from a production control to a market based um farm program and also has , has also sort of reemphasized soil conservation just because of the political nature of the interests of, of the people in the country. And as time has gone on from the thirties until today uh each year there's been steady productions and increase in farming, so that kind of affects the whole thing politically too, although Steve Com—the, today we still have quite a ways to go in terms of (inaudible few words here) it's also just become such a big industry.

KK: Do you have any sort of, like do you get a sense of how different Knox County would be without these programs? Like would there be a lot of people who might not be able to make it, farming? Is that a feasible question?

SL: Yeah, I, I think and this is, this is hard to prove, but I really think that um all four programs have played sort of a buffer in, in reducing the uh the flow of problems away from um, and I don't I'm not saying it would mean that there would be more land and houses in Knox County, but I think probably there would be fewer farmers, and the fact that it is factual that about 20% of the farmers produce about 80% of the agricultural goods, which if you think about it means that those 20% are more efficient than the other 80%. If they're producing 20% of the goods, just by nature of the statistics.

KK: Umm

SL: You would probably have larger units operating if you didn't have federal run programs, and its not just true of Knox County, its just that the whole country would be a—and it's sort of, I think a national debate right now when we talk about the farm bill, is whether we can afford farm programs to the degree that we have had them and there are some folks that are quite excited to read about how farmers are the ones (inaudible sentence). But then on the other end of the spectrum, you hear [click of a folder hitting a desk] people saying well, farm programs don't do enough for the small farmer ok—

KK: Umm

SL: well, how much is the public willing to pay to keep the small farmer?

KK: Isn't there some statistic that says that the some very large majority of the subsidies actually go to these huge producers?

6

SL: Well, at, the Environmental Working Group has information that you can find out who has received what um in terms of payments, the only problem is, that doesn't tell you exactly what the farm program, federal farm program payments are received. Some of them could be export subsidies, and if you look at those by state and then by county, and you can see that yes those large-scale farmers are receiving um the majority of the payments too, but it's probably more proportionate again to the 20% of the largest framers—

KK: Umm hmm

SL: who we said are producing 80% of goods and services and traditionally our program payments have been blind to a means test—

KK: Ok

SL: and that's originally. The only difference is and more recently part of our eligibility criteria is that we're starting to put income caps on participants for example um where to be eligible in Knox County or any country ah you can't have more than three previous years average adjusted US income of x amount of dollars and there has been no one affected by this legislation in Knox County, so umm it is the legislatures that are going to affect the party of the people from the top down and still it may not effect some of those larger producers because that's just for outside ag earned income, if they derive 70% of their income from agriculture they are allowed to have more than that amount of average adjusted income for more than three years.

KK: Oh

SL: So you would have to, you know you would have to change the legislation that's a law that's required for all for eligibility to um exclude those larger farmers who are receiving too many payments because just by nature [throat clear], the larger farmers based on how many acres they have in terms of payments. We also, we'll we have started, well we have income for payment caps for different programs each program has as, for instance the CRP program you can't receive more than 50,000 dollars a year or conservation programs and/or payment but if you were a huge entity you could receive cost share with (inaudible word) you, you if you spent 5 million you could get 2.5 million reimbursed for that so that when you look at the Environmental Working Group that's legislated [random voice] that doesn't show you how much that the participants benefit from all of it. So that, that, that side is interesting, it's fun to look at because you can tell who got how much money but you don't know exactly what program payment they got for it, and how much they had to invest in it—

KK: Yeah

SL: and so its not, its more of ah—

KK: [Sigh]

7

SL: I'm trying to think [background voice]—

KK: Yeah, so with the whole regulation of outside income, you were saying that if a farmer's making money not from farming that's when the income—

SL: If they're over the 2.5 million cap for average salary, if um, seven if, if they did not derive that, at least 70% from agriculture, they are not eligible.

KK: But if it was derived for agriculture they would be eligible.

SL: Yes

KK: Hmm that's interesting.

SL: But they still are limited to payments by are our caps like 50,000 on CRP, our marketing loan payments are um 75,000, our direct encounter cyclical payment programs are 40,000 um but ok, you can structure your operations so that as long as its an arms length deal, like you and I could be involved in a corporation and I could be say a 40% holder of that corporation so I could actually receive 40,00 dollars from the direct and counter cyclical payment from being under that operation and I could be out on a hill and I could receive 40,000 dollars on that, and then I could have a trust or something that could receive 40,000, then that's three persons entities that I would be able to receive these payments. So it's a little more complicated than me saying ok for COP all you can get is 50,000, for BCP all you can get is 40,000 or marketing loan payments all you can get is 75,000 because (inaudible sentence)... and I'm not trying to hide it from anybody.

KK: Yeah

SL: You know that's what they are but um they do exist where you can legally structure yourself but, its not like it's a, you can't create it on paper, you have to have an investment there but you have to have a separate accounting system for the different entities and you have to have a separate operation [throat noise from a far], and that's your equipment, you know so it's a bone fide operation, but it does let somebody that has multiple farming interests get paid for the different legal entities and, and so subsidizes the individual in three different ways.

KK: Ok

SL: [throat clear] so, you can get paid quite a lot through your interests in a corporation through your interest in the trust—

KK: Umm hmm

SL: and through your interest because of (inaudible few words)... We also almost problematically have allowed family-farming operations who have spouses involved to receive payment for the spouse, and payment for each spouse. Um because of a person,

8

who was living together was, and they were both were getting payments and a married farmer sued our government because they were excluding the spouse from receiving.

KK: Uh huh

SL: So that, there's (inaudible sentence)... So basically if you're a spouse of a farmer and have uh interest in the land, you are eligible for these payments too. Payment limits in Knox County are generally not a factor because we just don't have the scale of operation so—

KK: Yeah

SL: that you're likely to find in California—

KK: Yeah

SL: or out west where operations are you know bigger.

KK: Is it clear that small farmers in Knox County, do they, I mean, are they frustrated by the, the amounts that they would be eligible for because of the size of their operation or is it that its just th—

SL: Well [throat clear]

KK: that it's they are very appreciative of all the help they can get?

SL: Yes, most people [throat clear] are very appreciative of, of the use of this office so it makes it pretty easy to work here in the one sense (sentence inaudible)

KK: Yeah, ha ha.

SL: Um, the way I look at it is people that participate in the programs have to invest a certain amount of time in this office to get these payments—

KK: Umm hmm

SL: and that's part of the requirement, part of the structure, uh you tell some people about farm program payments, basically the IRS could do the same thing except we kind of fine tune it a little bit more, and we also have a presence in most counties in the country, so I kinda know what the farms are doing out there so, ha ha, they can't get away with a whole lot now though so, IRS just basically sees the flow of money we, we base our payments more on an operation or the size of operations going on and have this annual acreage reporting saga that takes up a lot of our time you know—

KK: Umm

SL: and you have the loans on farmer's harvests, so we know the acreage histories that they are asking for and um but a lot of it is just the same as what IRS does uh you know when they give deductions [folder slap on table] or uh different payments to people who qualify for different credits or deductions so its [throat clear], my I didn't oh this is a joke but um you know (inaudible sentence)... So my daughter was saying when she was in college and she took an economics course and she said you know dad I finally figured out what you do, you make transfer payments.

KK: laugh

SL: laugh

SL: I said yeah, that's right!

KK: Ha ha

SL: Ha ha

KK: it's true, I just learned that in economics too [folder slam] haha

SL: So um that's, that's what we do um, you know, what if the county is generating a revenue to make the payments, it's kind of academic but what we do is, is we push resources in sort of a —not a whole lot of means testing going on here but more based on the type of operation and the size of the operation with certain loans and um you know, the type of payment they're making uh the farmers, and other than that we could, we could—

END OF SIDE A

START OF SIDE B

KK: So, for those types of operations do you have to have people go out and do like site visits to regulate what each person has said on paper is actually happening?

SL: We have a um sort of a random spot checking process—

KK: Yeah

SL: a—ah long time ago they used to pretty much check everybody but then they decided that wasn't uh financially feasible so we do, ah a sort of a computer generated random spot checking system or uh if we know of problems because we have a presence in, in the local community, we can say you know John Doe we know he's not doing it right—

KK: Umm hmm

SL: and we're gonna stop this through a spot check. So for the most part the way it's structured I think there's, and it's easy for people to confide in their programs (inaudible)

few words), because this would go against their grain of honor because this would be a title so—

KK: Umm hmm

SL: (inaudible sentence), but we don't do that now because it's—

KK: Umm hmm

SL: (sentence inaudible)

KK: Ok

SL: you get what you get out of the market.

KK: Ok, so how many people do you have working for your office, is it a lot of people or—

SL: No, uh there's three people and myself.

KK: Oh that's not very many.

SL: And this office is [throat clear] being used by, I mean you could count more than three people if everybody was here but this office and the agency consolidated FSA, and the we are sort of a part of what used to be Farmer's Homeland Administration. (Sentence inaudible). So, part of the staff in here, uh we get along very well [folder click on desk] like I, I don't supervise two other people here because even though we married an the HDC—

KK: Umm hmm

SL: you know we came together, there's still kind of a varying between them and the community, actually the Farm Service Agency county employees are not federal GS employees we—

KK: Ah

SL: We we have, we're kind of a quirk in the ah group you might call us [throat clear] we're classified as CO but the money's all federal that pays us. You know basically the difference is um we don't have job retention like GS employees do we're, if they let you into a job here there's this ah, ah, musical chair process that occurs so that if somebody has more tenure security, they are willing to take his job, we're, we're more um I guess it's easier to manage us because like I said we're not committed here so you don't have to claim your position actually its happened [throat clear] where I've had to talk to people and let them go but you know—

KK: Umm hmm

SL: so but, but that's the reality of life.

KK: Yeah true

SL: So.

KK: So how much communication with like I guess the federal level do you have, or do people come and check up on the office, or do you communicate with other FSA offices?

SL: Well, yeah, we try to communicate as much as we can we try to um be a breast of all the changes that occur because that's a sort of constant [throat clear] where we're getting amendments to our [folder click on table], to our procedures and, and they come in temporary directive and amendments to handbooks or um there's, there's—

KK: Umm

SL: probably like (inaudible sentence). Somebody's come up with like 50,000 pages—

KK: Mm

SL: of legislation they call it um—

KK: Oh my gosh

SL: [throat clear] so, I think online too you can look it up online and then they have a lot of temporary directives [throat clear] that come in and ah make changes until they have time to incorporate them into the (inaudible sentence). So, uh that's how we get our federal mandates so with directives and then we cover internal auditing processes people come around and check things, assess our, and then a lot of that now since a lot of operation is in a base can be looked at remotely to see if there's you know patterns that show—

KK: Umm hmm

SL: things that are going on (inaudible few words)... communication problems.

KK: Yeah

SL: [throat clear] So, yeah, we're, we're not quite the classic uh Dr. Seuss book with the checker the checker spots—

KK: Ha ha

SL: we're uh a different story but it's, it's true to a certain degree you know it's interesting that you asked that, I, I volunteered to work in Louisiana for a while and it was it was under FEMA, and it seemed like FEMA had a person looking over your shoulder and they had a person looking over their shoulder and they had another person looking over their shoulder all the time too.

KK: Umm hmm

SL: So it's not quite to that degree with this agency, but it's we're more of a stable you know workload or (inaudible few words)... cut and run so to speak.

KK: Ha ha

SL: But a lot of our stuff is ah you know loan based so you know we have loans and if the loans are not paid off by their certain date you're, you're, you're right out there hanging until it's paid off. So, some of it's kinda of reportedly checked and then sometimes its people actually (inaudible few words) and if there's uh an indicated problem because of a producer or whatever reason that might heighten or elevate an issue of incorrectly administered program um, the office of investigators are going to be at your door. So we're pretty you know, in sort of a glass house as far as if you have sort of two laws that work against the consultants one which allows the Environmental Working Group to put on the web all the payments that people get is the freedom of information act so there's certain things that have been established by court houses that have to be (inaudible few words) [folder click on desk] on a certain time line so too, but then there's also the privacy act and it's a fine line to walk to make sure that your not divulging some private information uh that you know pertains to an individual too. So, if we're, we're always kind of scared when they ask the question not because we're afraid to give it out, but we're afraid you know in the process of defying—

KK: Yeah

SL: you know privacy (inaudible sentence)... freedom of information.

KK: Can you um, I don't really know how to phrase this question but can you tailor programs to Knox County or is that something more like the state level of organization? [Random background voice] For example, say there was some sort of extreme whether pattern that prevented loans from being paid off that year or the crop failed and the subsidy wasn't needed or something, how would that affect the—

SL: Well—

KK: the program?

SL: how you, certain programs are set up so they can be tailored, for example I don't know if you were around um I think it was in July when we had some really, really heavy rains that were isolated and in the northern part of Knox County, and flooding occurred in

the little Gleaway Creek area, about 15 peoples houses got filled in with water, um it hadn't flooded like that in say four years so they were using construction—

KK: Umm hmm

SL: and um so we have some programs like a program called emergency conservation programs that can help people out that have flooded houses, but if they had uh agricultural land destroyed or disturbed we have a program that you can request to help them reconstruct fence that's what it amounted to in this little watershed. A lot of tree trunks came down through the field um close to the stream, and they just took the fence out with them so we advertised it requested it, we got funding and so were able to help people out in that localized area. But for disaster programs that's an interesting question too because that's sort of (inaudible few words), that there's an effort in Congress to have disaster legislation 2006 crops. I read something recently that said well wait a second they've been (inaudible word) crop insurance, why can't they give me that extra benefits—

KK: Umm hmm

SL: that's kind of a localized thing, it's out west you know further. And so it would be kind— it would be generally when that happens they would say ok its targeted to drought stricken farmers (inaudible word) but then they generally pass an ad hoc piece of legislation and usually what it amounts to is if anybody had a disaster or crop loss here if it could be documented they'd be eligible, and that's national ad hoc legislation. So most of our programs don't amount to that revise in legislation. (inaudible sentence). Some national ad hoc legislation – they had like ah Florida citrus program where they actually developed an emergency conservation program uh in the specific practice working for ah tree plantations that were affected by hurricane Rita, and they never had added that bill before but it was so widespread out to the Gulf states that all of a sudden all the leading victims would come in here for their support (inaudible few words) because a lot of the acreage was just growing as what ever was used as. (Inaudible sentences here). So that was a new problem, and it was never programmed for that before because hurricanes, those few hurricanes were so widespread that (inaudible few words). Programs were adjusted changes were made to make those effective.

KK: Ok, so if you had to sort of sum up how you see um I guess what the FSA's role here is in Knox County, would you categorize it as—I know earlier you mentioned part of the goal was to basically—

SL: Well, well, you know it's a safe reliable source of food. And overall I think the programs really do that because they kinda [throat clear] buffer income for farmers uh so that they can sort of have a more reliable income on a small scale th- the larger the scale and the more diversified an operation is the less, they really have to worry about that you cause a big corporation is pharmaceutical industry and that also has like a factory industry and a new fashion, are doing well. Namely a pharmaceutical will cover that so

[folder click on the desk] that they don't go out of business but generally farmers uh don't have that capability on the scale that they're on.

KK: Umm hmm

SL: So I think it, it really helps farmers kinda even out if they are having a bad year you know having our programs.

KK: Yeah

SL: And so in that sense in, in of course everybody and you know this is my personal opinion is that I think it's important to have a strong agriculture section in terms of this whole economy and, and its not like we would ever really be completely dependent on another country for food—

KK: Yeah

SL: umm you know 'cause we, we do have a good agriculture base. I think the programs do make it more predictable and more attractive for people to stay in farming where the, where the income drive from it is pretty large in some cases.

KK: Yeah

SL: Of course this is you know, farm programs wouldn't do it alone, the tax structure helps too—

KK: Umm hmm

SL: 'cause you know Howard, he's got a class, Howard needs to have a class, Howard needs to have a class and schedule F's!

KK and SL: Ha ha

SL: And that, that's where, it's all there too you know people wouldn't be in farming unless, without all the credits and benefits you have in the tax structure.

KK: How much of it or is any of it, could it be seen in the light of say, if there are people in Knox County who would really like to keep a lot of their food local, as opposed to you know, or who actually enjoy raising their own food and knowing neighbors that raise similar types of food as opposed to being so reliant upon going to the grocery store when most processed food are coming from outside sources. I mean—

SL: Well

KK: can you see FSA in helping to support that, or is that too um much of a—

SL: well we don't have any programs that do that right now, and I think they would, it would have to be structured so that you would you know, you would, and maybe it would be done uh more easily with the tax structure that uh people would benefit from to prove that they were marketing their crops that would reduce the transportation of the goods or something like that.

KK: Umm hmm

SL: Umm again we are trying ta—we are pretty much blind to that we help those who produce for local market the same as we help some body—

KK: Right

SL: who produces for a national one.

KK: Ok

SL: But it could be done, it's not part of the farm legislation right now.

KK: Umm hmmm

SL: Umm there are you know, there are if you wanted to talk to Mark Arnold about programs that would make money available for start up operations in the structures specifically for that he's, he's in this office here too and that would be sort of a part of Knox County administration. So they actually provide money through direct loans or through guarantees for commercial loans (inaudible word) which make it safer for the commercial institutions to, to have a, for people who would have a riskier operation and that generally is a smaller operation, unless capital, because it's riskier to fund or to confront. So that's the general subsidies program, and all the programs that I've been talking about are pretty much blind in terms, are whether these are local for local um food and fiber or for cross the county bigger or to continental. I'm not saying in the future there couldn't be legislation but I mean to do that I understand you know, the myself, you know some of the things that seem like we buy stuff that's so distance from us, and we sell stuff to everybody that's so distant from us too—

KK: Umm hmm

SL: that is it seems where it seems like we're just kinda spinning our wheels and—

KK: Yeah

SL: umm there would be certain benefits that could be (inaudible few words) for decentralized food system. Umm at the same time probably studies would have to be made as to determine the efficiency of that too, so you kinda might be sacrificing one for the other in terms of efficiency and, and it depends I think in part um how much people are willing to subsidize that or either pay for that—

KK: Yeah

SL: too, and the same argument can possibly be made for organic uh—

KK: Umm hmm

SL: food, uh, which is more labor intensive and generally costs more to raise than um food that's not raised organically—

KK: Yeah

SL: and uses more mechanization or maybe active chemicals to produce than organic.

KK: Yeah

SL: So, that's a, it's an open debate as far as I'm concerned, and then there's safety issues too I mean can you use non ag chemical in farming, you may be sacrificing some safety—

KK: Umm

SL: too. So that's, that's I don't know, I'm not trying to be a proponent of one thing—

KK: Yeah

SL: or other you know, I just ah try to administer in a fair way for everyone.

KK: So, for instance if there was some sort like economic incentive um say subsidies didn't favor if you had more land you'd get more money, but if you had, if you were providing for more local source you would some how have an advantage over someone who was providing to ConAgra or something that's you know processed far away. Would that be, do you think a program like that would ever be feasible, if people were interested in something like that?

SL: Well I think you know we, it's its' pretty amazing as, as what can be legislated so I would say that its feasible or possible um when we talk about new farm bill legislation in a way the Secretary of Agriculture has already said that we will probably be getting more involved in specialty products because there is you know as far as the money that's in agriculture.

KK: Umm

SL: Our traditional subsidized crops are becoming less of the total piece of the pie and the um more specialized in use crops are a bigger part of it, I think, and you know those interests are speaking louder—

KK: Yeah

SL: saying we want part of that program benefit too, and so as, as it moves that way I can see it being incorporated, where if it would be targeted to producers of local ag that would be used in a more local, localized environment too. And I see the benefits to that.

KK: Umm

SL: To me it's cost of moving things around, and as we look at it in the future you can certainly see benefits to having the recentralization of the food system—

KK: Ha ha

SL: and not sacrificing quality or availability, so yeah.

KK: Yeah, and then in terms of I guess in terms of farmers having feedback on federal programs I mean are they just represented as other citizens in terms of where they put there vote, or just like I don't know if like Farm Bureau would do—

SL: Well Farm Bureau is one—

KK: organizations like that—

SL: to, to have farmers express and then we have the secretary buildings in existence all over the country, and our agency was at a conference in Cleveland and he was there, and that was what I was just talking about where if you specialize or introduce crops those producers are evolving their desire to collect the benefits from so that's another you know he, he's provided that (inaudible word) he initiated that—

KK: Umm hmm

SL: program in the areas, saying come to these sessions we'll record all your comments and we'll take them into consideration. So there's, there's a number of different ways I guess messages convey what's necessary in farming. You know you always have your, your local ah representative so most people don't talk to them, so if you talk to them you probably will do some good.

KK: Yeah

SL: So, you know that there's a number of different ways the ideas can be communicated on what you want for the future but if, if they are not planning on being verbalized they're planning on being ignored.

KK: Yeah is there anything else that I didn't ask or any questions, do you have any?

SL: No

KK: And if I had like a random question might, I be able to contact you again?

SL: Well, I am always available.

KK: Ok thanks, and would you suggest that I talk to anyone else?

SL: Well you know, you could talk to mark Arnold and—

KK: Ok

SL: and maybe he could talk to you right now, I don't know if you wanted to but um, or set up a time where you could find out about, you know, who they, they make loans to, to ah youth and traditionally underrepresented groups and beginning farmers and so yeah that's just another segment of what farm service is.

KK: Ok

SL: It's all Farm Service Agency now [noise of talking] yeah so, and that's basically just Mark and Marina's office, and there's (inaudible word here) who comes in twice a week and does like the total (inaudible few words).

KK: (inaudible comment)

SL: I mean the numbers of, of clients they work with is a lot less than us but they're spread out more too [paper shuffle noise]

KK: Yeah, well thank you—

SL: Yeah you're welcome.

KK: for you time.

SL: And I was-

KK: I am sorry I had to subject you to—

END OF RECORDING